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THE MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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THE MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

"To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit."— I. Cor. xii., 8.

The subject to-day is this: "What does religion owe to science, and what does science owe to religion?"

Religion and science are like two neighbors, living side by side in mutual friendliness and helpfulness. Science helps religion, enlarges its views, brings it down from speculation to reality, teaches it to verify its doctrines by experience. Religion awakens the soul to a sense of responsibility, rouses the thirst for knowledge, gives impulse to progress, and so animates science with a higher life. But it is sometimes thought that these two neighbors are on bad terms with each other, and so we read about the "Conflict between Science and Religion." There is no such conflict, and cannot be; for one kind of truth cannot be at war with another. Science means truth as seen in nature: religion means truth as seen in the human soul and the human life. It is, however, sometimes the case that, while the heads of neighboring households are on friendly terms, there may be quarrels between the children of the two families. There are foolish scientists who despise religion, and think it outgrown; and there are foolish religious people who think science dangerous. Little Tommy Christian says that Willie Science is a bad boy, and will not go to church; and little Willie Science says that Tommy Christian is a fool, who cannot do his sums correctly. But the fathers and mothers of the two families may be meantime living in perfect harmony.

Instead of conflict, I wish to speak of the help rendered by religion to science, and science to religion. And, first, let us see what science has done for religion.

Science has enlarged our conception of God by enlarging our conception of the universe. Before science did this, our little world was considered to be in the centre of creation; and it was believed that the sun, moon, and stars revolved around it every twenty-four hours. Our little planet was the most important place which God had created, and the Lord was supposed to have this for his chief care. But astronomy came, and showed us that the earth was one among myriads of planets, the sun only one of many million suns, our world but a speck in the heavens. And so with the growth of the universe grew our idea of its Creator and Governor. This will sooner or later render impossible such beliefs as that the God of all worlds died on the cross in Judea to make satisfaction to himself for the sins of men.

And, as astronomy has wonderfully widened out our conception of space, so geology has equally increased our knowledge of time. Once, it was supposed that about six thousand years ago all things were made in six days. But geology shows a long succession of epochs, during hundreds of thousands of years, in which our earth was being slowly formed to become the home of man. Science has proved that about a hundred million of years may have elapsed since the planet was sufficiently cooled down to support vegetable life. And these vast periods, which confound the imagination when it tries to realize them, are but as a moment of time to the eternity of the Supreme Being.

Again, science has helped theology by its doctrine of universal law. It is profoundly convinced that the kingdom of nature is a kingdom of law; that it constitutes a vast order, in which nothing comes by accident or caprice. This great order is subject to no violation or interruption. What seems a miracle to us is only a revelation of some higher law before unknown. This conception, adopted by theology, takes away the thought of God as acting otherwise than by wise

and benign law. With him there is no change or shadow of turning, no repenting that he had made man, no capricious selection of some favorite races or individuals for special blessings. These views, which belonged to the infancy of religion, are being dispelled by science, and replaced by a nobler conception of the Deity. We see God now as a perpetual creator, not waking and resting, not coming and going, but living in all life; maintaining all existence; the security and shield of his creatures; in the midst of a vast and unchanging order; working without haste or rest in his continual, all-pervading activity. And this, again, gives us a higher and nobler view of the Deity.

Science has also helped theology by its careful methods of examination and verification, by its simple devotion to facts and reality. It has thus quickened the sense of truth everywhere. It has caused theology to look at the facts as they are, not as it wishes them to be. The sin of much religious teaching in the past has been a tendency to pious fraud, to teach what seemed effective and impressive without regard to its truth or falsehood, to do evil that good may come. The serious devotion of science to the realities of things has reacted in a wholesome way on theology, and inspired it with a profounder regard for simple truth and plain fact.

In teaching the unity of nature and the perseverance of law, science has also dispelled many evils and superstitions founded on the notion of supernatural interference. It has put an end to the belief in witchcraft, once so universal. It has destroyed belief in Satan as a terrible and fatal enemy in our midst. It has relieved the soul from a multitude of dreadful fears, and has taken away some of the blackest shadows that have rested on the human mind. Let us be grateful to science for such gifts as these,— that it has made religion more reasonable and humane, and enabled us to trust in the unchanging and eternal wisdom of the All-perfect Being, from whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.

And now let us ask if science owes anything to religion? and, if so, what?

Religion, in our day and in civilized lands, means Christianity. Other religions are in a state of arrested development: this is progressive, forgetting the things behind, reaching out to those before. This religion is ever new and ever young. It is fresh as on creation's day. It has had its periods of inaction, its winters of discontent, its lapses into Epicurean self-indulgence, or Hindu asceticism, or Pharisaic formalism. It has run into Greek speculation, or made for itself a kind of Egyptian hierarchy. But it has shown that it could renew its youth, throw off the corruptions of the past, and make itself a new man in Christ Jesus. After a long winter of cold and storm and a reluctant spring, all the little buds and shoots seem to say to each other, "Come, let us wait no longer: let us agree to go out into the warm sun and air." And so thousands of little leaves appear trembling in the breath of the south, the grass hurries up, the violets send their fragrance from the meadow; and a new summer has come. So religion renews its youth, and brings fresh life to the soul. And this, like the other, is the life of God. One is the life of God in nature, the other the life of God in the human heart.

Such a wave of summer life flowed over Europe with the Lutheran Reformation; and not only was there a revival of religion, but the new faith created a new growth in art, science, and literature. The new heavens made a new earth. Freedom gained by religion won freedom for thought in all other directions. Men of science had seldom been willing to be martyrs for the truth. The great Galileo allowed himself to be silenced by the Inquisition. But Martin Luther defied papal brief and imperial ban, and said, "Here I stand: I cannot do otherwise." He stood up for his convictions in spite of all danger, and so won freedom for science also. The freedom which is the boast of science it did not win for itself: it was conquered for it by religion. Luther demanded, in the interest of religion, freedom of inquiry, freedom of speech, freedom of thought; and science has entered into his labors and enjoyed their fruit.

Freedom needs to be won by martyrdom. Men must be willing to die for the truth before they can break down the opposition of prejudice, bigotry, and what Shelley calls "the anarch, Custom." It takes religion to make martyrs. Science does not often produce them. Scientific men will renounce wealth and ease, will labor on in poverty and neglect, to perfect their discoveries. But they are not so ready to die for the truth as religious believers are. And the blood of martyrs is not only the seed of the Church, but the power which opens a highway for advancing truth.

Religion also helps science by creating an interest in truth. The root of scientific discovery is fed by the conviction that truth exists, that it can be discovered, and that it has a value in itself apart from its use and application. Many discoveries have been made before any one saw how they could be applied to human uses. When the connection between electricity and magnetism was first observed, no one foresaw the vast practical application which would be made of this discovery in the telegraph and electrotyping process. The love of truth for its own sake, which is the glory of science, does not come from any materialistic view of the universe. It is born out of faith in the infinite. It comes when we see in all truth a revelation of God. It was proclaimed by the apostle when he said, "God is light; and in him is no darkness at all." The old Theosophic doctrine that God is an abyss of darkness, and the modern Agnostic doctrine that nothing can be known of God except his existence, are powerless to produce the enthusiastic love of truth for its own sake which is essential to the progress of discovery. It is the sight of something divine in beauty which makes the true artist, and it is the sight of something divine in truth which makes the true man of science. And this, again, comes from a religious faith in the infinite, the unseen, the eternal, as the source and foundation of the finite, the seen, and the temporal.

But, while science needs for its soul and spirit this joy and truth, as something divinely beautiful in itself, it also needs

as its encouragement the sight of its successful application to human needs and wants. The great discoveries of science have gone into human life, have had their popular application to the needs of men, have tended to diffuse comfort more widely, and to give to the many what formerly was enjoyed by the few. The discovery of printing, of the mariner's compass, of steam-power, of the power-loom, of the telegraph and locomotive, of the power-press, have diffused comforts and luxuries among the masses. All tend to the elevation of the many. The laborer who rides in a railway car has a means of locomotion that no monarch possessed fifty years ago. The hard-working mother who has photographs of her children might be envied by countesses a hundred years ago, who paid great sums for a miniature by Malbone and Isabey. The English day laborer has on his table bread made of American flour which Queen Elizabeth would have been thankful for, and his children wear garments of American cotton surpassing in comfort the clothing of the fine ladies of the seventeenth century. But what has produced this tendency to the diffusion of comforts among the masses of men? It is the sense of the infinite value of every human soul: it is the aroused feeling of the dignity of human nature. Just as we have found the spirit of science to consist in the love of truth as truth, so we find its application in the love of man as man. Mankind is aroused from its torpor, is made desirous of progress, is led to seek advantages for itself, as it recognizes within its immortal nature and destiny. When Jesus said to his disciples, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"; when he went among publicans and sinners, and made it a proof of his divine mission that "the poor had the gospel preached to them"; when Peter declared, "God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean"; when Paul said that "not many wise, not many noble were called, but that God had chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and weak things of this world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised,

hath God chosen ; yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught those that are," — then were planted the seeds of the worth of man as man, which have grown up into the faith that all men are equal before God, and have a right to every opportunity for progress and improvement. Take away this faith in the inherent worth of man, substitute for it the notion which is growing popular among some scientists, that to try to raise the weak, the down-trodden, and the outcasts is a mistake, that you ought to make the strong stronger and let the inferior class die out, and you lose one of the mightiest motives for universal progress. The final outcome of this doctrine would be a world full of self-satisfied, self-complaisant Epicureans ; and whether this would be the survival of the fittest is at least doubtful.

Out of this Christian faith in the worth of truth and of the human soul has come the chief motive for founding schools, libraries, and colleges. All of these were at first founded by religion, and dedicated to Christ and the Church. Education in all its forms has been the result of Christian effort to elevate and instruct the mass of men. By this education, by the knowledge thus imparted, science has been fostered. In this soil it has taken root.

The universities of Europe were founded by religion. The common schools of America were established by Puritans, who, poor and hardly able by their toil to support life, were yet determined that their children should be able to read the Bible.

Science, as science, knows nothing of God, duty, or immortality. Religion, as religion, knows nothing of scientific discovery or natural law. The one is concerned with things seen and temporal, the other with things unseen and eternal; but each needs the other for its own fullest life. Religion, if it deals only with things unseen, becomes monkish, narrow, and weak. It needs the wonderful discoveries and inventions of science, in order to understand the beauty and glory of the world in which God has placed us. Science, without religion, loses by degrees its motive to progress. Without

the religious faith that there is a divine presence in all things, the world becomes a mere mechanism and routine. Without faith in the immortal progress of the soul, it does not seem very worth while to pursue human improvement here. We need the conviction of our infinite destiny to make our finite life worth living. We need a great hope for our inspiration. Man is too great to be satisfied with only earthly expectations. Give him nothing but time, and he does not care for time. Earthly and heavenly hopes must go together, in order that either shall be sufficient. The idea of right must be made absolute, infinite, and supreme, in order to lift man above himself, and make him a fellow-worker with God. Thus, science opens always a wider sphere for religious activity and endeavor, and religion becomes evermore the inspiration of science. The foolish children of these families may have their little quarrels, but the two great households of knowledge and faith must always live together in mutual help and peace. The great mechanical philosopher of antiquity, Archimedes, expressed what science asks of religion when he said, "Give me a place outside of the world, on which to rest my lever, and I will move the world." The world is moved when the laws seen at work on the earth become the laws of the universe,—of the Infinite and the Eternal World above, around, within, and beyond.